

**Abstract 148**

**TITLE:** Minnesota Pharmacy Syringe/Needle Access Initiative SAI)

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**ISSUE:** There is overwhelming evidence that syringe access programs reduce HIV-related risk factors among injecting drug users and can be implemented without harmful social repercussions. Given the limited political and financial support for needle exchange programs, ensuring pharmacy sales of needles/syringes becomes particularly important.

**SETTING:** Community-based retail pharmacies across Minnesota serving injecting drug using clients.

**PROJECT:** Minnesota Pharmacy Syringe/Needle Access Initiative (SAI)-Implementation. State legislation was enacted Jul 1, 1998 that provided for voluntary pharmacy sales of needles/syringes in quantities of 10 or fewer without a medical prescription for an accompanying drug. Individual pharmacies participate in SAI by certifying their support of a syringe/needle disposal activity. Accompanying the sale of syringes/needles, pharmacies provide referrals to the state's I&V hotline, HIV counseling and testing sites, health care resources, treatment facilities, and disposal information.

**RESULTS:** MDH staff are responsible for the implementation planning, materials development and dissemination, responding to public inquiries, training, and general communication with individual retail pharmacy managers. Participation in SAI was sought through several promotional activities: direct mailing to all retail pharmacies in the state; presentation at two statewide pharmacy conference meetings, direct phone contact with district managers of retail pharmacy chains, and a pilot needs assessment with a sample of pharmacy managers. Both the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy and the Minnesota Society of Independent Health System Pharmacists support the SAI. As a result, 426 pharmacies (approximately 45% of the total retail pharmacies) are participating in SAI. In partnership with the Minnesota AIDS Line and outreach workers at CBOs, IDUs are referred to participating pharmacies. With input from community members, other state agencies and pharmacists, a brochure describing safe disposal of syringes/needles, along with a "Do Not Recycle, Household Sharps" label were developed. Two brochures describing SAI were developed: one targets pharmacists and the other the public. After 9 months, nearly 31,000 brochures and referral cards, and over 7,000 labels were distributed.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** It was advantageous to planning the implementation of SAI by conducting a pilot needs assessment of pharmacists and attending the two statewide conference meetings; this aided in identifying what barriers may exist and facilitated responding to individual opposition of the initiative. It was also advantageous to use input during the development of the disposal brochure. The support of syringe sales received from the two professional pharmacy organizations provided leadership in this profession and encouraged pharmacy participation. A very small amount of funds accompanied the change in legislation, thus challenging current staff in executing the initiative.

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